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Augstein:

Der Spiegel Revisited

By RUDOLF AUGSTEIN

BONN—I can scarcely imagine any journalist of any country who reads of the struggle of The New York Times to publish the Vietnam papers not feeling involved. Seldom has the natural-born conflict between Government and press presented itself in such a representative fashion.

Seldom has the subject been so significant, the published text so authentic. Seldom has the moral question emerged so clearly: May a government which is steering toward an election campaign push forward war plans which have a content almost opposite to the officially declared policy?

Understandably there were no such secret papers of comparable importance and explosive power here with us in the Federal Republic. We are a middle-sized country, incapable and, meantime—thank God—also unwilling, to stir up an undeclared war for the sake of our prestige. However, if the news magazine Der Spiegel, of which I am chief editor, had published, for example in Adenauer's day, a report only half as explosive, one would not need much imagination to conceive what our Adenauer Government in Bonn would have undertaken.

The leading members of the sheet, up to ten men, would have been arrested by night and held for months in prison. The publishing house would have been occupied for five weeks by hundreds of policemen and investigated page for page, document for document.

I am not imagining things, for this is just what happened to Der Spiegel in 1962 when it published an article about the defense concept of the then Defense Minister Franz Josef Strauss from the pen of the present State Secretary, Conrad Ahlers.

The article stirred no attention in NATO circles, and none at all among the military personalities of the Kennedy Administration, who justifiably mistrusted the nuclear ambitions of the German Defense Minister. But the Bonn authorities claimed the article contained 41 "state secrets" and it was years until Der Spiegel could invalidate these absurd accusations.

At no time did the Federal Government pay compensation to the innocently imprisoned, or any other form of compensation to Der Spiegel. This was an act of higher justice, for the circulation and prestige of the maga

the so-called Spiegel Affair. It is forgotten that our magazine survived only thanks to the solidarity of its readers and the aid of unknown friends.

So nobody in the United States should be surprised that the "treason" of The New York Times was reported in German papers below headlines reading: "Now America has its Spiegel affair, too." But the comparison is lame. First, as already mentioned, our article then entitled "conditionally prepared for defense" cannot be measured in terms of importance with the current revelations of The New York Times. Second, the blow of the Adenauer Government appeared then to everyone as an act of revenge of Herr Strauss, who was bitterly battling Der Spiegel.

In the case of The New York Times, on the other hand, underecurrents of resentment may play a role, but hardly the main role. Above all else, no one in the U.S. Government intends to smash The New York Times. No, the case of The New York Times against Nixon shows the moral problem of press liberty in great purity. Personal emotions are not in the forefront. It seems to me the Government saw its own credibility in peril when it was disclosed how sneakily President Johnson had lied to the American nation.

It is always amazing how blind governments can be when they do not consider the consequences of hitting the press in the eye. As far as Adenauer is concerned, the Spiegel Affair contributed to his forced resignation, and his Defense Minister lost his post.

President Nixon has only gotten as far as drastically limiting the freedom of action which he desired to extend. Today he hardly has an option.

The war in Vietnam, which was planned so consequentially and craftily, does not allow itself to be continued any more. If it had been won it would be as disastrous for the American nation as arming the Germans with nuclear weapons in 1962. Therefore I wish The New York Times luck in its fight.

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